

AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY

COURBET

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COURBET

Catalog

THE HILLA VON REBAY FOUNDATION
77 MORNINGSID DRIVE
GREENS FARMS, CONNECTICUT 06436

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

May 3 - 29, 1938

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G. COURBET, par GILL.

C O U R B E T

IT is hardly likely that one looking at an exhibition of Courbet's pictures in 1938 could see in them that element of strangeness which the painter's contemporaries saw in his work. If one confines oneself to the paint and canvas, one sees pictures which resemble a host of academic productions. Their fellows are to be found in scores of the most respectable museums throughout the two hemispheres. They do not seem bizarre in either technique or subject matter. We are accustomed today to pictures which resemble nothing and have no interest in resembling anything; if their makers have succeeded in producing a harmonious pattern, they are satisfied. They are no longer created exclusively of paint. Bits of glass, newspaper, string, cloth are assembled to give texture to them and a shock to their observers. But the canvases of Courbet are not revolutionary in any such sense as this. The brushwork and drawing—for the most part—are traditional; their subject matter—peasants, workmen, huntsmen, girls—not unusual. But it is impossible to limit either the interest or the significance of a picture within its frame. A painting has the unfortunate habit of overflowing the molding that surrounds it, of becoming a symbol, a hieroglyph, a war cry, a moral lesson, a warning.

It was perhaps that fringe beyond the frame of Courbet's pictures which made them seem strange and even dangerous to their author's contemporaries. Painters before Courbet had painted peasants, but who had painted them so that they looked as if their labor was a penalty for sins which they had not committed? We doubtless can no longer see that element in them, just as we are no longer sensitive to the influence of chivalric ethics in *Hamlet* or to the buffoonery of Shylock. Courbet's contemporaries saw the *Stone Crushers* as socialistic propaganda; saw the *Burial at Ornans* as cruel satire; saw the *Demoiselles des bords de la Seine* as por-

nography. Nothing of that could be on the canvas unless one knew a great deal that was behind the canvas. Certain conventions about the subject matter of art—whether it be pictorial or not—were accepted as the sole legitimate subjects.

Art must, in the first place, strive for beauty and beauty must be graceful, noble, edifying. Subjects which were not in themselves recognized as beautiful must be embellished. Thus, the peasants and fishermen of Leopold Robert were given the bodies of classical deities and the poses of Hellenistic sculptures. They were, one might say, the children of the Arcadian shepherds. Just as Violetta in *La Traviata*, dying of tuberculosis, looks as buxom and blooming as she did at her entrance on the scene, so a peasant to be fit for paint and canvas must have clean hands and face and a fine physique. That the average peasant was badly nourished, lacked sufficient vitamins in his diet, and was as twisted and gnarled as an ancient tree might be true, but the average peasant was not to be represented in art. Only the peasant as a symbol of rural beauty would be permitted.

But art, in the second place, must set itself the task of teaching a great moral lesson. If you painted the Spartans at Thermopyle, you did it to teach Frenchmen to be patriotic. If you painted an old man, you did it to show the tragedy of senility, or its serenity, or its homely charm. If you painted a landscape, you did it to awaken a sense of nostalgia for the country, to declare the glory of God, to hymn the industry of the peasant. Great moral lessons unfortunately are frequently ambiguous. It is only when they happen by some lucky chance to fit in with tradition that their meaning is clear and simple. When one's feelings for religious values have shifted, a picture expressing such sentiments must be capable of shifting its significance too or it dies. We can, for instance, no longer look at a primitive idol and feel the religious awe that its makers felt. A Buddhist priest robe from China with its multiple patches becomes for us a beautiful piece of brocade to be hung on a wall; we are insensitive to its religious symbolism. So with many paintings of the Renaissance—Mystic Marriages, even Cruci-

fixions and Last Suppers—with their personages in Italian court costume; we call them “worldly” and wonder that their makers could have thought of them as “other-worldly.” Consequently there is no telling in advance what idea a man of 1938 will read into a picture of 1538 and if it were the ideas which gave importance to a picture or piece of sculpture, few works of art would have any interest for men of a later day.

The innovation for which Courbet was in the main responsible was the insistence that works of art needed neither to be embellishments nor symbols of an idea. Anything which existed in nature was to him interesting as a possible picture. If peasants were ugly and workmen depressing, if women were fat and awkward and men were commonplace and dull, let them be represented as such. The artist was to take the attitude of the scientist to whom all fact was on the same level. The biologist makes no distinction between beautiful and ugly animals; to the chemist a substance with a foul odor is as interesting as one with a flower-like scent. The pleasant and the unpleasant belong to the realm of human emotion; they have no place in “nature” if that term means the non-human.

But the “natural” covers a variety of things which only the nineteenth century had begun to think of as natural. Before that period human beings were almost supernatural, or at least they were not believed to obey the same laws as animals, vegetables, and minerals. It was not until 1828 that biochemistry was put upon a laboratory basis. The first suggestion of a scientific sociology dates from the same period. Scientific psychology had to wait until the third quarter of the century. It was 1866 when Mendel promulgated his famous law that genetics could be thought of as more than a symptom of divine rewards and punishments. In fact it is not unfair to say that one of the really great achievements of the nineteenth century was the scientific interpretation of human life.

The transfer of the scientific attitude towards mankind from the classroom and laboratory to literature and the other arts was begun in the Second Empire. Other times had praised Nature and urged

the life according to Nature, but only at that period had Nature lost her picturesqueness, her capriciousness, moral qualities and become the realm of fact. In literature the movement was sponsored by Zola; in sculpture, by Rodin; in music, by Berlioz and the composers of such operas as *Carmen*, *Louise*, *The Girl of the Golden West*, *Pagliacci*, *The Jewels of the Madonna*, *La Bohème*, in painting, by Courbet. Each of these men had his predecessors and his disciples. No individual, of course, can be credited with so great a cultural trend as Realism. But these are the names that stand out justly in history, for these are the men who on the whole were held responsible for it by their contemporaries.

To be realistic, one may say at some risk of superficiality, is to believe that a fact is interesting in its own right as artistic subject matter. It is to explore every field of human life in search of new material, regardless of what popular esteem may say. It is to disregard the picturesque, the pretty, the edifying; to allow the observers and readers and listeners to draw their own conclusions. It is therefore a philosophy as well as an aesthetic creed. Because of Courbet's place in this movement, as well as because of the intrinsic interest of his canvases, it is fitting that the Baltimore Museum of Art, situated in a city renowned for its university, sponsor an exhibition of his work. To make this exhibition possible it was necessary to rely upon the good will and kindly interest of collectors and museums throughout the country. Nothing is less agreeable to a collector and to a museum public than to look at the empty spaces on a wall usually occupied by some masterpiece. Our own public realizes this and is therefore doubly grateful to the owners of the pictures listed in the Acknowledgments for their generous loans. It is hoped that they will be repaid in some measure by their contribution to our knowledge of nineteenth-century art, so frequently misunderstood, as well as by the increased admiration which such an exhibition is bound to produce for the painter of Ornans.

GEORGE BOAS

Secretary of the Board of Trustees

CHRONOLOGY

- 1819 Courbet born on June 10th at Ornans in the department of the Doubs.
- 1830 Enters seminary where he studied drawing under Beau, a pupil of Baron Gros, who takes him on sketching expeditions into the country.
- 1837 Enters Royal College of Besançon, where the drawing classes are conducted by Flajoulot, a member of the school of David. Withdraws from college to enter municipal art school.
- 1839 His first published work, four lithographs illustrating a book of poems by his friend, Max Buchon of Salins. (Two portraits of Buchon by Courbet exist, one at the Hôtel de Ville at Salins, the other in the museum at Vevey.)
- 1840 Arrives at Paris to begin his legal studies. The plan is never carried out and Courbet instead begins to study art, associating with Steuben and making frequent visits to the Louvre. During this period he paints several landscape studies in Fontainebleau and executes portrait commissions.
- 1842 Hires a studio and paints his *Courbet au chien noir*, now in the Petit Palais.
- 1844 *Courbet au chien noir* accepted by the Salon.
- 1845 *Le Guitarrero* (see no. 1 below) accepted out of five canvases submitted to the Salon.
- 1847 The Salon refuses three of his pictures: *Le Violoncelliste*, *L'Homme à la pipe* (now at the Museum of Montpellier), and a portrait of Urbain Cuenot (now in the Academy of Fine Arts of Philadelphia). Published a drawing of armed insurgents in the *Salut public*, a revolutionary paper which lasts but two issues.
- Trip to Holland where he is impressed with Ostade and Craesbeeck and writes home that he "venerates Holbein."

- 1849 The exhibition at the Salon is jury-less. Courbet shows six canvases.
Is given a second prize for the *Après-dînée à Ornans* which the government buys for the Museum of Lille.
- 1850-1851 Violent criticism of his canvases at the Salon: the *Burial at Ornans*, the *Return from the Fair*, the *Stone-Breakers*, with others.
- 1855 Opens his own exhibition in competition with the world's fair on June 28th, 7 Avenue Montaigne. Forty canvases and four drawings exhibited. Among them the *Atelier*, now in the Louvre. The term "realism" is launched. In the foreword to his catalog Courbet says, "The label of realist was imposed upon me as the label of romanticist was imposed on the men of 1830. Labels have never given a fair idea of fact. If this were not so, works themselves would be superfluous. . . . I have studied without prejudice and without party spirit the art of the ancients and the art of the moderns. I have no more wished to imitate the former than to copy the latter. My thoughts, moreover, have never been to reach the stupid goal of art for art's sake. No, my wish was simply to perfect in full knowledge of tradition the rational and independent feeling of my own individuality. Knowledge for power—such was my thought. Power to translate the manners, the ideas, the appearance of my time, according to my own understanding; in a word, to produce living art, such was my aim."
- 1856 *Les demoiselles des bords de la Seine*.
- 1857 *The singer, Gueymard, in the role of Robert le Diable*. See no. 4 below.
- 1860 Trip to Frankfort where he is much admired. Exhibition in Besançon.
- 1861 Accepts invitation of a group of art students to open a school.
- 1863 Exhibition at Saintes.

- 1866 Friendship with Whistler. Paints Whistler's model, Jo, who appeared in *The White Girl*, under the title of *La Belle Irlandaise*. See no. 16 below.
- 1869 Decorated by Ludwig II of Bavaria.
- 1870 Refuses the Legion of Honor.
During the war with Germany heads the federation of artists which protects works of art.
- 1871 Becomes member of the Commune from the Sixth Arrondissement. On the sixteenth of May the Colonne Vendôme is pulled down. Condemned on September 2 to six months in jail and a fine of five hundred francs. Paints his famous still lifes of fruits while at Sainte-Pélagie.
- 1872 Excluded from Salon because of his role during the Commune.
- 1873 Goes into exile in Switzerland to avoid paying for the reconstruction of the Colonne Vendôme.
- 1877 Fined 323,091 francs and eight centimes to be paid in yearly payments of ten thousand francs for reconstruction of the column. His property seized and sold.
Dies on December 31.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Museum is greatly indebted to all those who lent paintings by Courbet to this exhibition:

Arnold Seligmann, Rey and Company

The Art Institute of Chicago

Miss Etta Cone

The Detroit Institute of Arts

Arnold Genthe, Esq.

Dr. Douglas H. Gordon

M. Knoedler and Company

Leon Kroll, Esq.

Lewisohn Collection

Lucas Collection, The Maryland Institute

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Phillips Memorial Gallery

The Smith College Museum of Art

The Springfield Museum of Fine Arts

Vassar College

Miss Edith Wetmore

Wildenstein and Company

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art

CATALOG

(The canvases listed below are arranged as far as possible
in chronological order.)

1. LE GUITARRERO (before 1845)

Lent by Miss Edith Wetmore.

One of the earliest Courbets in America. This romantic representation of the artist in troubadour's costume—or what he imagined to be troubadour's costume—is typical of that period in his youth when he depicted such subjects as *Walpurgis Night*. It was the sole canvas accepted by the Salon of 1845 out of five submitted.

2. MIDDAY DREAM (1845)

Lent by the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Exhibited in the Salon of 1849 as *La Baigneuse Endormie*. The jury of this Salon awarded Courbet his only prize, a second.

3. GUEYMARD IN THE ROLE OF ROBERT LE DIABLE (before 1857)

Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Exhibited first in the Salon of 1857. Gueymard, now overlooked by the encyclopedias—even Grove, was a famous singer in his day. Born in 1824, he made his debut in the role depicted here at the age of twenty-four. His greatest successes were in such operas as *The Prophet*, *William Tell*, *The Huguenots*. He resigned from the Grand Opera in 1868. The picture in spirit is perhaps closer to Courbet's romantic manner than to his realistic.

4. AFTER THE HUNT (probably between 1855 and 1860)

Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art
(from the Havemeyer Collection).

One of a number of hunting pictures, including *La Biche Forcée*, *Chasse au Chevreuil*, and *La Curée* (Boston Museum).

5. PORTRAIT OF MONSIEUR SUISSE (1861)
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art
(from the Havemeyer Collection).
6. THE MEDITERRANEAN (before 1860)
Lent by the Phillips Memorial Gallery.
One of a series of marines which covers the coasts of France from Palavas (where Courbet began to paint in 1858), through Royan, to Etretat.
7. PORTRAIT OF MADAME OLIVIERS (about 1860)
Lent by Wildenstein and Company.
8. PORTRAIT OF ALFRED BRUYAS (about 1860)
Lent by Arnold Genthe.
Bruyas was one of Courbet's most enthusiastic patrons. He bought as well as praised. The thirteen Courbets in the Museum of Montpellier are a bequest of this generous man. He is shown greeting the painter in the famous canvas called popularly, *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*.
9. THE FOREST IN WINTER (probably middle '60's)
Lent by the Cincinnati Art Museum.
10. YOUNG WOMAN ARRANGING FLOWERS (1863)
Lent by Wildenstein and Company
11. LE Puits NOIR (about 1864)
Lent by the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts.
The Puits Noir is in the Valley of the Loue, a favorite subject of Courbet. His first teacher, Beau, used to take him and his fellow pupils on sketching trips throughout this district.
12. THE SOURCE OF THE LOUE (about 1864)
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art
(from the Havemeyer Collection).

13. THE SOURCE OF THE LOUE (about 1864)

Lent by Wildenstein and Company.

14. LADY WITH A CAT (1864)

Lent by Wildenstein and Company.

Painted in the environs of Ornans during the period of Courbet's return to his home.

15. PORTRAIT OF M. NODLER, THE ELDER (1866)

Lent by the Smith College Museum of Art.

16. PORTRAIT OF M. NODLER, THE YOUNGER (1866)

Lent by M. Knoedler and Company.

The two Nodler brothers were friends of Courbet whom he painted during a visit to Deauville-Trouville.

17. LA BELLE IRLANDAISE (1865-1866)

Lent by the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art.

Whistler's well-known Jo, who sat for his *White Girl*, is the model for this portrait, of which a second version exists in the Havemeyer Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, and a third in a private collection. At least one of the three was painted during the visit to Deauville.

18. AN ALPINE SCENE (1874)

Lent by the Art Institute of Chicago.

Painted during Courbet's exile in Switzerland, three years before his death.

(The following canvases require special study before dating.)

19. THE JUMPING JACK

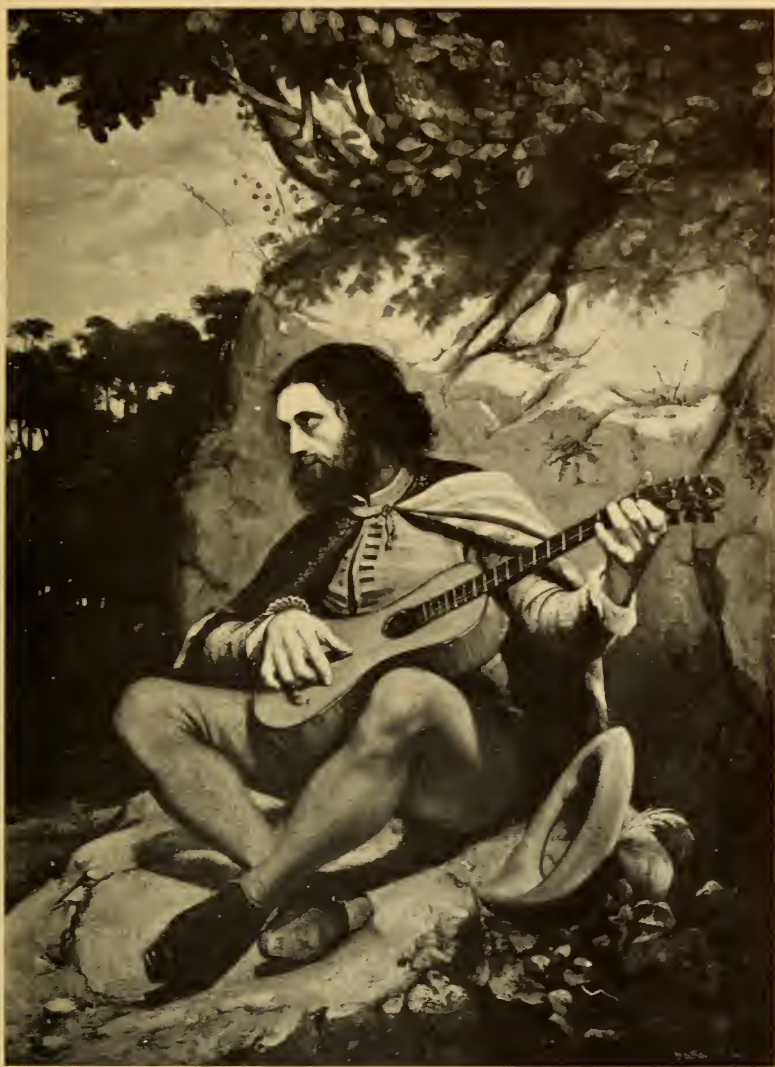
Lent by Vassar College.

20. LANDSCAPE

Lent by Leon Kroll.

21. SELF PORTRAIT
Lent by the Lewisohn Collection.
22. LA GROTTTE
Lent by Miss Etta Cone.
23. LANDSCAPE
Lent by Arnold Seligmann, Rey and Company.
24. WATERFALL
From the Lucas Collection, lent to the Baltimore Museum
of Art by the Maryland Institute.

Meier-Graefe reproduces in his book on Courbet another
version of this picture which at the time of publication was
in the Galerie Heinemann, Munich.
25. NOCTURNE
Lent by Douglas H. Gordon.



1. LE GUITARRERO
Lent by Miss Edith Wetmore



2. MIDDAY DREAM

Lent by the Detroit Institute of Arts



3. GUEYMARD IN THE ROLE OF ROBERT LE DIABLE
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art



7. PORTRAIT OF MADAME OLIVIERS
Lent by Wildenstein and Company



21. SELF PORTRAIT
The Lewisohn Collection



9. THE FOREST IN WINTER
Lent by the Cincinnati Art Museum



13. THE SOURCE OF THE LOUE
Lent by *Wildenstein and Company*



16. PORTRAIT OF M. NODLER, THE YOUNGER
Lent by M. Knoedler and Company



19. THE JUMPING JACK
Lent by Vassar College



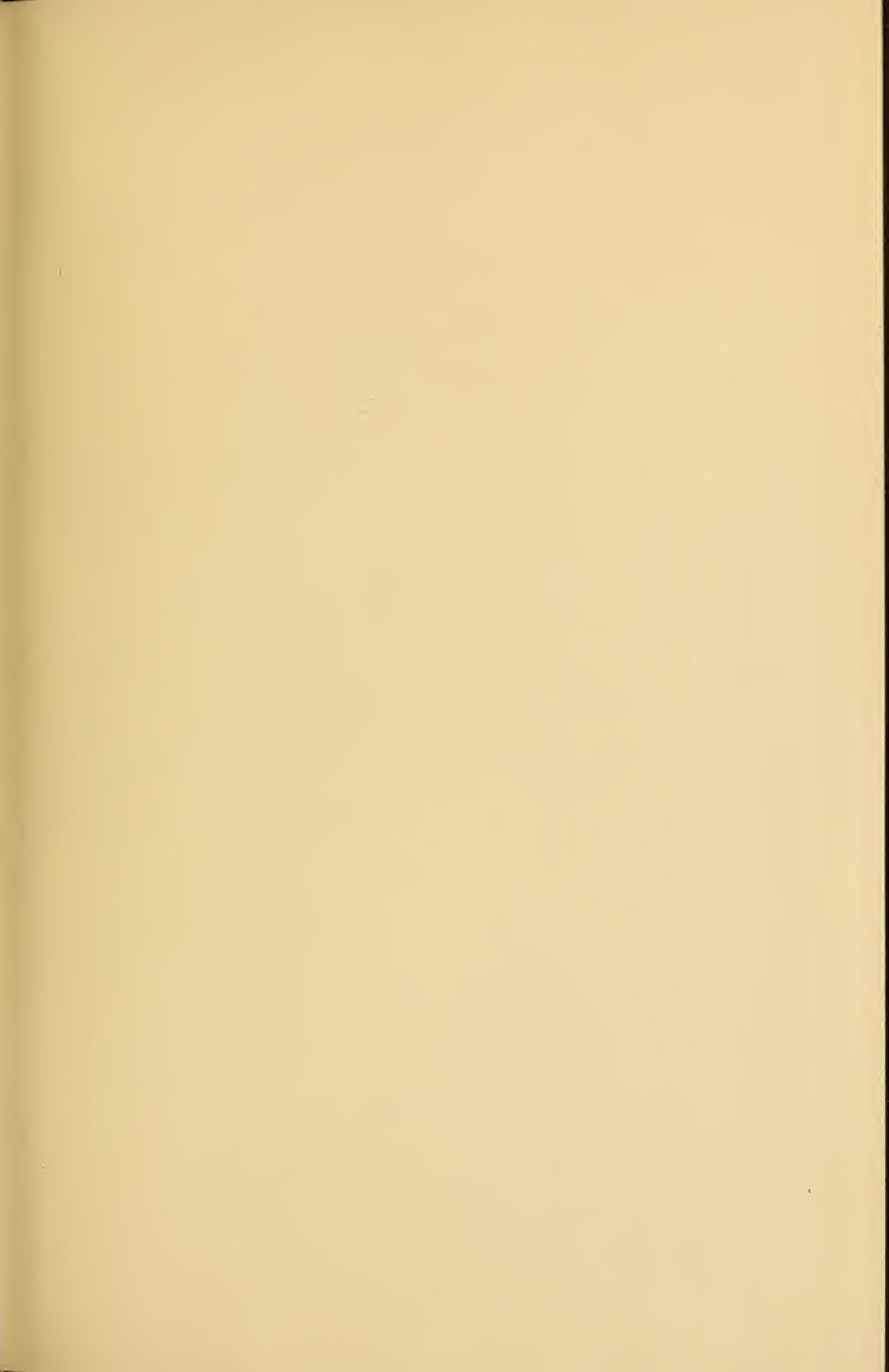
4. AFTER THE HUNT

Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art



17. LA BELLE IRLANDAISE
Sent by the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery







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AUTHOR Baltimore Museum of Art,
TITLE May 3-29 , 1938.

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